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JANUARY - MARCH 2014

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Welcome to the first issue of TAGA *Sports* for 2014! We start off the year with a mixed bag of stories that we hope you will like, that will inspire you to turn off that gadget you got for Christmas, get off that couch, and get moving.

I would personally like to point you to one story that has particular resonance for me. Titled "Back to Basics" *(Page 20)*, it highlights childhood games that have become as fusty as CDs and cassette players. Yet these were the stuff that childhood memories were made of. Who doesn't remember getting together with other neighborhood kids after school to play hopscotch, tag, hide-and-seek, or kick the can until the sun goes down? Back then, traffic was practically nonexistent so we'd play on the street itself or in any vacant lot and nobody had to explain the rules to us because everybody knew how to play the games. Also, we were equal opportunity players—everybody got to play. There were no coaches, no expensive equipment, no official playing fields. All we had were our ingenuity, boundless energy, and an indefinable sense that we had to play as many games as we can before the streetlights come on. I still remember our mom yelling at us around 6 in the evening to get inside already and we'd race home, all flushed, caked with dust, sweaty, and tuckered out.

Yes, they were games but they were never just *games* for us. We all took them with the solemn seriousness that all our childhood hearts could muster. Despite their freewheeling nature, these deceptively simple games were subtle lessons in gamesmanship, fair play, and how to conduct oneself in the face of loss. Even then, as children, we knew that crying when one loses a game was frowned upon. Throwing a tantrum because you lost a round was an invitation to jeers and name-calling. And cheating will always give you a bad rep. Children, when left to themselves, have a fairly effective means of enforcing rules when they engage in play; we call it taunting. And yes, we were also scrappy. Nobody was above a little punching and kicking when push came to shove.

It's just too bad that many of these childhood games are being forgotten, with today's youth more engaged with their electronic gadgets. With the rate of childhood obesity skyrocketing, maybe it's time to revive these games. It will not only provide a means for kids to exercise but also an outlet for their restless energy. Along the way, they may just create experiences that they will later fondly remember.

I hope you'll enjoy reading this latest edition of TAGA *Sports*. Email me at editor@saipantribune.com for comments, suggestions, and violent reactions.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Editor

COVER ART
Tennis pro Luke Michael Beling poses at the tennis courts of the Fiesta Resort and Spa Saipan.

Photography by
ROSELYN MONROYO

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HOLDING COURT

Justis for one, Justis for all.

MARK RABAGO

WRITERS' BLOC

ROSELYN MONROYO

When Roselyn first wrote a story about Luke Beling, she mentioned he is from Guam. She was wrong. Luke is a new resident of Saipan and a welcome addition to the thriving CNMI tennis program. Sorry, Guam.

MARK RABAGO

Mark never took up taekwondo and was never bullied growing up. His only experience with martial arts was when he took up judo and Hwa Rang Do as P.E. classes in college. When Mark first arrived on Saipan, he covered motocross and Cuki Alvarez at Cowtown. He also became good friends with *tukayo* Mark Halstead while covering local bowling tournaments.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

Smartphone app can assist with concussion detection and treatment

ROY WENZL
The Wichita Eagle

An entrepreneur with close ties to Wichita State University has developed an iPhone application that researchers say could revolutionize how a key symptom of concussions can be quickly and accurately detected within minutes.

The "Sway Balance" app, developed by WSU alumnus Chase Curtiss of Tulsa has been approved by the Food and Drug Administration. It was tested for two years in Wichita, both at WSU and among hundreds of athletes at Wichita East and Andover Central high schools, and in schools in Oklahoma and California.

"It's a very cool tool," said Jennifer Hudson, the head athletic trainer for the Wichita school district who helped test the app for two years with East High athletes.

What Curtiss did, said Jeremy Patterson, the WSU scientist who studied and tested it, was develop a cheap, fast, accurate tool that trainers and other health care specialists have never had before. It gathers measurable evidence in moments, showing that a person has probably suffered a concussion.

"A lot of the initial assessments by trainers on the sidelines have had to be much more subjective, much of them based on how the athlete is feeling," said Hudson, who also teaches in the athletic training program at WSU. "A concussion until now has not necessarily been an injury that you can 'see,' like a fat (swollen) sprained ankle.

"But this app shows real numbers and gives you a better assessment."

It doesn't "prove" a person has a concussion, she said, because some concussions don't affect the area of the brain that controls balance. But it gives a better assessment than she's seen before.

TESTING BALANCE

How the app works is simple, said Curtiss, who earned a master's degree in exercise science at WSU in 2008 while working under Patterson.

"We're not diagnosing concussions," Curtiss said. "We're screening balance as a key symptom of a possible head injury."

The app works like this:

Trainers like Hudson ask an athlete to hold the iPhone or iPad on his or her own chest. Then she tells them to close their eyes.

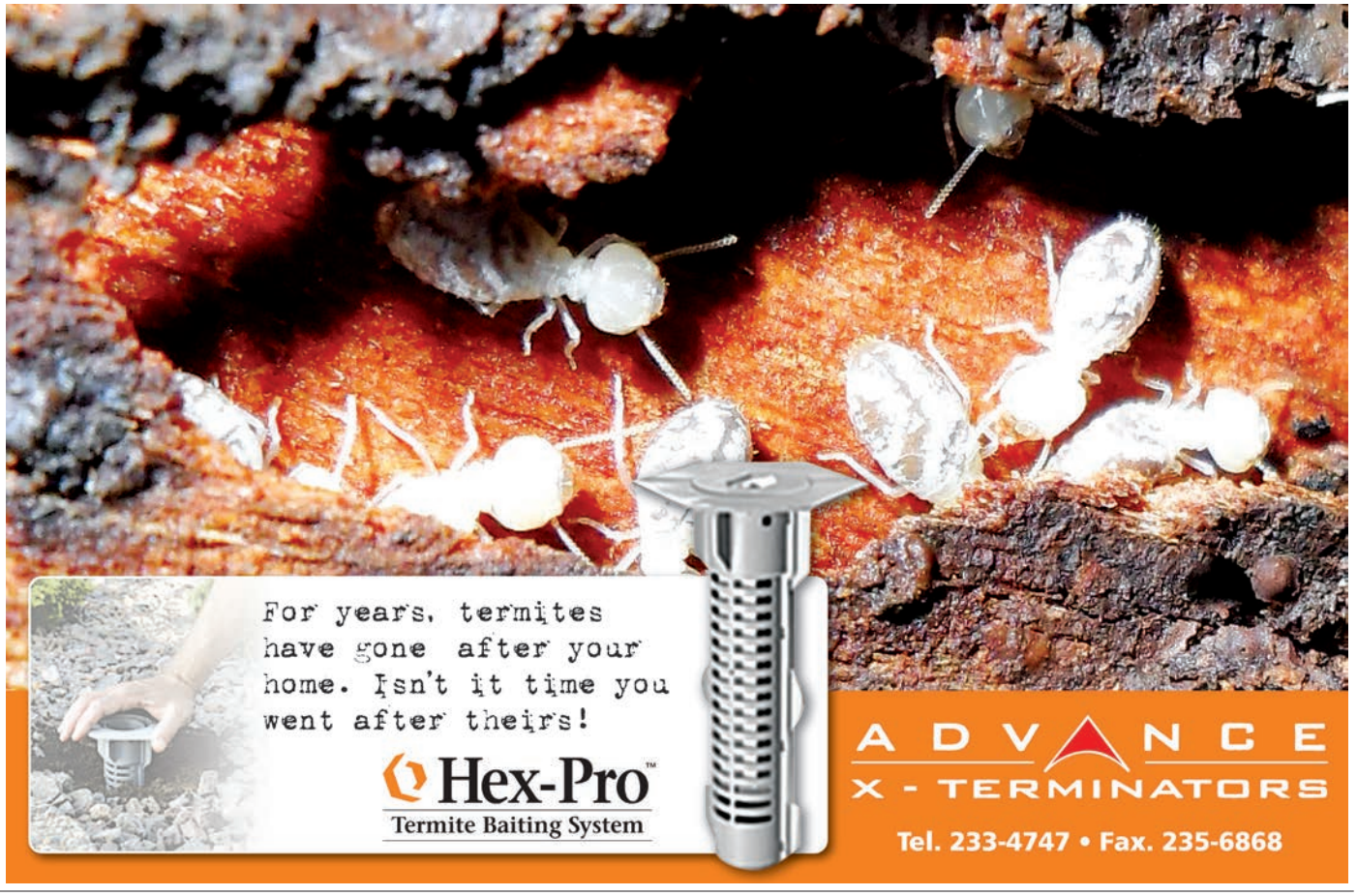
She puts them through three tests that take about 10 seconds apiece: With your eyes closed, put your feet together. Then put your dominant foot in front of the other, heel to toe. Then lift the dominant foot, and stand on the non-dominant foot.

The app then gives an indication of numbers.

Athletes will be tested at the beginning of a season, when everyone is healthy and un-injured. That gives the trainer a recorded baseline of how much balance the athlete has when healthy. That recorded baseline is then compared with whatever the app might show next if the athlete is ever injured in a practice or competition.

Hudson said the app, within minutes, gives a reading about whether an injury victim has developed a new problem with balance. This can be done on the field or court right after an injury.

Currently, researchers said, athletes, team trainers and coaches don't know for sure that an athlete has developed a concussion until extensive physical tests and expensive medical scanner tests are done.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They also rely more heavily now on how the athlete tells them he or she feels.

Some of those same tests will still need to be done, but the advantage of the new technology is that trainers won't have to guess when a player needs to sit down, or go to a doctor.

CONCUSSION DANGERS

Patterson, an associate professor and director of the human performance laboratory at WSU, said the app is an important innovation not only for National Football League players but for children and adults who play sports of any kind.

"Most people think concussions are when an NFL linebacker hits a quarterback helmet to helmet," Patterson said. "The dangers are more extensive than that."

Thousands of high school and college football players suffer concussions every year. Concussions, Patterson said, are a significant problem for soccer players, for basketball players, for tennis players diving for balls, for any sport.

Soccer enthusiasts have become increasingly concerned. Most concussions in soccer do not involve head-to-head but rather head-to-knee collisions, or a "shaking" injury to the brain inside the skull during collisions or falls where the head is whiplashed.

Medical people have even begun to ponder the safety of baseball catchers who get hit in the protective mask with a foul tip or an errant pitch.

JAIME GREEN/WICHITA EAGLE/MCT

Jennifer Hudson, the head athletic trainer for the Wichita school district, uses the "Sway Balance" app at Wichita East High School in Wichita, Kansas.

Another good thing this app will do is help sort out when an athlete is ready to return, first to practice, then to competition, Patterson said.

The real danger of concussions is not the first head injury, Patterson said. It's "second-impact syndrome," a dangerous outcome.

"It's very important that the first injury gets picked up and identified," he said. "You get a second injury, and you are really cooked."

Brain damage and recovery can be more extensive after a second injury, he said.

OTHER USES

Because the new tool measures balance, researchers also said this tool will almost certainly become a key feature in seemingly unrelated professions.

"The possibilities are pretty astounding, really," Hudson said.

Police officers can use this kind of tool to accurately find balance problems in drunk drivers or impaired drivers, researchers said. Physical therapists could use it to cheaply and quickly track the progress or deterioration of nursing-home patients, who must exercise to prolong their lives or recover from injuries.

Curtiss said that under the Affordable Care Act, physical therapists treating elderly clients must now assess and put a value on function limitations for every patient who comes for treatment; the new app could help speed that process, he said.

And athletic teams from grade school to the NFL to the NBA could use it not only to deal much more effectively not only with concussions but—because it assesses balance—could more accurately and quickly chart progress of athletes recovering from ankle sprains, knee problems and many other injuries.

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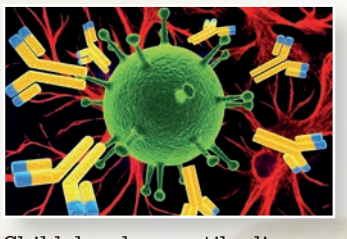

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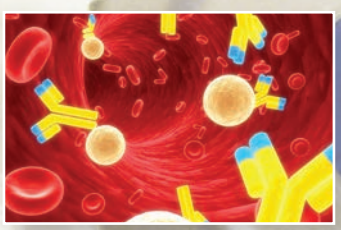

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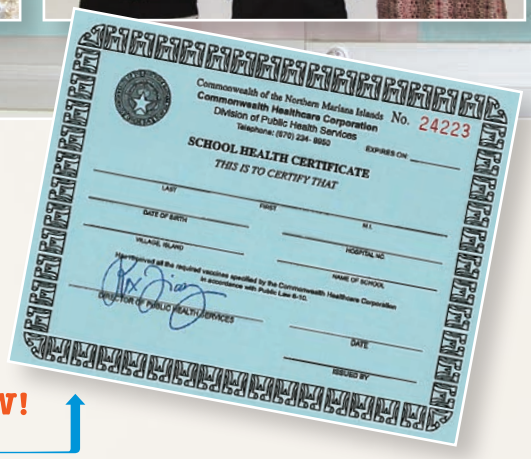
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HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Making the journey from the tee box to the hole

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

FILE PHOTO shows Fina Sisu resident J.J. Atalig at the 2010 Tournament of Champions. ROSELYN MONROYO

You don't need a golfer to know that golf is played by hitting the ball and getting it into the hole. It takes one, however, to explain how the ball *makes* it to the hole.

J.J. Atalig, one of the few local golfers playing in the elite Championship Flight and who recorded a handful of wins last season, gives TAGA *Sports* a peek at how he plays a hole and the "the tools of his trade" found inside his golf bag.

TEE BOX

A golfer's first shot is at the tee box, the area at the beginning of a hole. A regular course usually has three tees: blue (longest and for Championship Flight), white (middle and usually for lower level players), and red (shortest and for women). The fourth tee (black/gold) is used by the pros.

NOTE: Titleist 913 D2 is known for its high speed and optimized launch with reduced spin. Nike, Callaway, Ping, TaylorMade, and Adidas are some of the other brands and a regular driver usually costs between $300 and $600.

A player uses a driver when teeing off and he selects the equipment depending on the distance (in yardage) of the hole. A driver is composed of a shaft with a grip and a club head.

When teeing off on a long hole (over 400 yards), Atalig uses a

From birdies to bogeys

Playing a par 4? Here are common golf terms for your performance:

		Number of strokes
Albatross *Three strokes under par* (Hole-in-one on a par 4)		1
Eagle *Two strokes under par*		2
Birdie *One stroke under par*		3
Par *Standard score for the hole*		4
Bogey *One stroke over par*		5
Double bogey* *Two strokes over par*		6

*Some golfers call this a "buzzard"

Graphic: Lee Hulteng © 2008 MCT

Titleist 913 D2 9.5 driver with an upgraded shaft (*Fujikura Motore stiff 72 grams*). On a shorter one—below 370 yards—he picks *Titleist 913 Fairway Wood 15 degrees* with an upgraded shaft (*Fujikura Motore stiff 75 grams*) or a *Titleist Hybrid 20.*

"I use Titleist because whenever I hit it on the sweet spot it gives out this crisp sound that makes me want to hit one just like that again. However, choosing the driver will depend on the weather and most especially the condition that I'm in," Atalig said.

FAIRWAY

The fairway is the closely mown area of the course and the ideal landing area off the tee. It bridges the tee box and the green. Golfers use either irons or woods when hitting shots from the fairway. A driver is the biggest type of wood with its large head and long shaft for maximum speed. Irons have all-metal heads that have flat angled faces, shorter shafts, and more upright lie angles than woods. Irons can be used all over the course to get out of trees, move out of hazards, manage a difficult approach to the green, and even hit from the tee box to a short or dog-legged hole.

"When hitting shots of the fairways I use my *Titleist 712*

NOTE: Top of the line irons range in price from $700 to $1,200, while woods' price range is from $300 to $600

AP2 Forge Irons with a *Project X 6.0 upgraded shaft*. I've been playing with this brand for well over two years and it feels good when that golf ball bounces off the club head," the 37-year-old Atalig said.

BUNKER

Atalig believes golf is a game of recovery. You forget the bad shot and move on. A bad shot can bring the ball to a bunker, one of the three hazards on a golf course. The other two are water hazards (lakes and rivers) and natural hazards (thick vegetation). A bunker is usually

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Championship Flight winner J.J, Atalig, center, shows his trophy presented by 2013 Joeten Memorial Golf Classic tournament chair Somia Quan, left, and member Matt Deets during the awards ceremony for the weekend competition held on Nov. 9, 2013, at the Laolao Bay Golf & Resort.

NOTE: A sand wedge costs as low as $40 and as high as $200, depending on the brand.

positioned near the fairway or green and is oftentimes filled with sand. A "sand wedge" (a sub-class of irons with greater loft) is used to take the ball out of the bunker and requires a skilled player to do it.

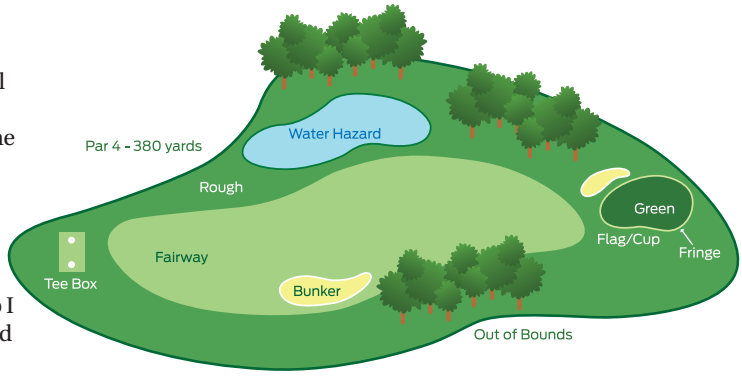
Atalig uses a *TaylorMade Rac 58 degrees 8 bounce* to hit out of the bunker. In avoiding other hazards, he said it is mostly a mental game.

"I work hard on maintaining my composure and attitude. I use a lot of course management and try to picture different shots that will bring me back into the game," Atalig said.

GREEN

Finally, after a long tee shot, ball drop at fairway, and survival at the bunker, the ball is now on the green. A green, also known as putting green, is the area on the course that surrounds the hole, with very trimmed grass and smooth ground.

"On the green next to the cup I use a Scotty Cameron putter and even when I'm still far from the hole I still use the same putter to roll the ball to the hole. I use this putter because I'm comfortable with it and the cosmetics on it are awesome," Atalig said.



NOTE: Putters costs between 100 and $500, depending on their customized features and brand.

Putters are customized clubs and the only one among the 14 clubs that are allowed to have added features. They may have appendages that help players aim for the hole, non-circular grip cross-sections, and bent shafts or hosels.

PRE-SHOT

Atalig, who credits the late Jess Wabol, former Superior Court presiding judge Edward Manibusan, Seung Woo Kang, and Jeff Taylor for the significant improvement in his game since trying out the sport seven years ago, said that having the right club is crucial but it also helps to be patient in figuring your shots.

"I always discipline myself with my pre-shot routine on any given time from the tee box to the green until the ball falls into the hole," said the Marianas Golf Association official, who shares his success in golf with wife Juanette and their children.

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SPORTS CALENDAR

JANUARY

Saipan Little League Baseball: One of the biggest sports programs in the CNMI will kick off its 2014 season on Jan. 17 at the Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios Ballfield. Over 500 youth will be playing in the Majors, Junior, Seniors, and Big League division games.

Saipan Baseball League: Formerly known as the Saipan Major League, this is the island's premier baseball league and is kicking off on Jan. 20. The Tan Holdings Brewers are the defending champions.

MISO Boys Basketball League: Private and public schools battle for basketball supremacy in both the varsity and junior varsity divisions.

MISO Girls Volleyball League: Private and public schools trade spikes and serves in a bid to win the high school championship trophy.

FEBRUARY

White Coconut Tennis Classic: Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association's first tournament of the year and features a unique event—the mixed up doubles contest—which pair an adult player with a junior netter. The tournament also holds competitions for various age groups.

Sun Palace Hotel Singles and Doubles Badminton Competition: Northern Marianas Badminton Association's season-opening tournament and will have its second edition after joining NMBA's calendar of events last year.

NMASA Annual Awards Banquet: Northern Marianas Amateur Sports Association recognizes athletes, coaches, and officials who made significant achievements last year.

MARCH

Saipan Marathon: The biggest running event in the CNMI draws over 700 runners on- and off-island.

NMA All Schools Qualifying Tournaments: Students from various schools fight for entries to Northern Marianas Athletics' All Schools Track and Field Championships.

NMIFA Spring Youth League: Northern Mariana Islands Football Association holds official competition for U15 and U18 age groups and friendly and grassroots-oriented matches for the lower age groups.

This advertisement is sponsored by Tan Siu Lin Foundation

Ken McCain goes up against two Toka Degree defenders while suiting up for I Love Ladder Beach in last year's UFO open caging. ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Ken McCain towers over the competition

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

At 6'9", Lt. Kennith McCain may very well be the tallest player to ever see action in local basketball leagues. Because of his stratospheric height and albatross-like wingspan, the U.S. Coast Guard officer has always been the defensive stalwart of every team he has played on.

Aside from assuming the Defense Minister tag on island, the soft-spoken McCain is also no slouch on offense, towering over everyone for easy stick-backs, feathery perimeter jumpers, and even a crowd-pleasing dunk or two.

In the most recent league he joined, McCain made it to the mythical team of the UFO open league, which cemented his status as one of the basketball players to be reckoned with in the CNMI.

Due to his dominating presence inside the basketball court, some players have resorted to taking cheap shots against him. McCain said some of the more physical players have this tendency of boxing him out using their forearms and elbows, but because they are shorter than he is, their extremities more often than not hit his ribcage, which has left him battered, bruised, and blue.

Local basketball aficionados hope that McCain doesn't retire his high-tops though, as rarely do they see a gangling 6'9" cager running up and down the court of the TSL Sports Complex, Gilbert C. Ada Gymnasium, or the open air courts of Garapan and Gualo Rai.

TAGA *Sports* recently caught up with McCain and he obliged us with a sit-down question-and-answer dialogue. *(He had to sit down or I would get a stiff neck from craning up at him.)*

Q: How tall are you and are you aware that you are probably the tallest basketball player to ever see action in local leagues?

A: I'm 6'9" and no, I assume there had to have been someone taller than me in the past.

Q: Have you always been tall?

A: As a child I was always one of the taller kids in class but it was not until I was 14 that I hit my growth spurt and grew 6 inches over the summer from 5'10 to 6'4", then my growth slowed until I reached 6'9" by my senior year in high school.

Q: What are the advantages of being that tall? Conversely what are the disadvantages?

A: The advantages are that you have better view of the court and rebounds are easier and most people assume that you can't shoot 3s so they will not come out to guard you so I get uncontested shots. The disadvantages, though, are that you are slower than most of the smaller players on the court.

Q: Did you play college ball?

A: No, I never played college ball. I had to focus on my education.

Q: What is your natural position in the basketball court?

A: I am naturally in the center position.

Q: How would you describe the type of basketball being played on island?

A: It seems to be more of an international style with FIBA rules, which is different from what I am used to in the mainland. Here, there seems to be more outside play and no inside game down in the post.

Q: When did you arrive on island and what are your impressions of Saipan?

A: I arrived on Saipan in July 2012. Saipan is a beautiful island and the people are very friendly. It reminds me of the small town I grew up in Arkansas.

One in four adolescents meet physical-activity guidelines

NANCI HELLMICH
USA Today

Teens need to get a move on it: Only one in four adolescents ages 12-15 are physically active for at least 60 minutes daily, new statistics show.

The government's physical-activity guidelines recommend that children and adolescents do an hour or more of moderate-intensity to vigorous aerobic physical activity every day.

"We can aim to do better than 25 percent," says the study's lead author, Tala Fakhouri, an epidemiologist with the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

These statistics are important because research shows that physical-activity behaviors in childhood often continue into adulthood, Fakhouri says.

Research consistently shows that physical activity declines as kids get older, she says. Another study by Fakhouri and her colleagues found that 70 percent of kids ages 6 to 11 meet the national physical-activity guidelines.

This drop comes at a time in kids' lives when they are going through a lot of physical and emotional changes, along with increasing social distractions and academic pressures, says Michael Bergeron, executive director of the National Youth Sports Health & Safety Institute, a partnership between Sanford Health in Sioux Falls, S.D., and the American College of Sports Medicine.

With sports, adolescents often have to choose between playing basketball and going to a party, between playing tennis and studying for a test. "We have to give the kids credit that there's a lot going on at this age."

Plus, it's a differentiating time for sports, as kids are maturing and their athletic abilities are developing at different rates, he says. "Some kids don't make the school or travel teams in sports they have played for years. That perception of being left behind may prompt a number of kids to step away from a sport. The lack of quality PE in high school and earlier grades, along with less of an emphasis on and limited time and places for safe, free play, further limits opportunities for our youth to experience and learn to enjoy sports and physical activity."

But kids need to be active. Studies show that regular exercise promotes overall physical health in children, increasing their lean muscle mass and strengthening their bones, Fakhouri says. It also boosts their self-esteem and capacity for learning. Some studies have shown that physical activity helps teenagers deal with stress, she says.

In the latest study, boys (27 percent) were slightly more likely than girls (22.5 percent) to do moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for at least 60 minutes daily, but the difference wasn't significant, she says. Other studies consistently show boys are more physically active, Fakhouri says.

Playing basketball is the most popular physical activity among active boys, followed by running, playing football, bike riding and walking. Running is the most popular activity for active girls, followed by walking, playing basketball, dancing and bike riding.

The data are based on questionnaires answered by 800 youth who participated in two government surveys in 2012. The adolescents were asked to report the number of days they engaged in 60 minutes of physical activity that increased their heart rate and made them breathe hard some of the time. This included PE class, organized sports and physical activity they did on their own time. Because the youth self-reported their own exercise, the results may slightly overestimate physical activity for this age group, Fakhouri says.

BRYAN PATRICK/SACRAMENTO BEE/MCT

Annette Higuera, left, and Claire Haupt share a jump rope together at their P.E. class at Antelope Crossing Middle School in Antelope, California. The program has won a statewide award for the best P.E. program.

SOME IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

MODERATE-INTENSITY
- Biking
- Brisk walking
- Skateboarding
- Rollerblading
- Hiking

VIGOROUS-INTENSITY
- Active games such as playing tag, running, chasing
- Biking
- Running
- Sports such as basketball, soccer, ice or field hockey, tennis, swimming
- Jumping rope
- Martial arts such as karate
- Cross-country skiing

MUSCLE-STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES
- Games such as tug of war
- Modified push-ups (with knees on the floor)
- Resistance exercises using body weight or resistance bands
- Rope or tree climbing
- Sit-ups (curl-ups or crunches)
- Swinging on playground equipment/bars

BONE-STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES
- Games such as hopscotch
- Hopping, skipping, jumping
- Jumping rope
- Running
- Sports such as gymnastics, basketball, volleyball and tennis

Source: Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans

OTHER FINDINGS

- 60 percent of boys and 49 percent of girls were physically active for at least 60 minutes five days or more each week.
- 8 percent did not engage in physical activity for 60 minutes on any day of the week.
- Normal-weight and overweight boys were more likely to be physically active for at least 60 minutes daily than obese boys. Normal-weight girls were slightly more likely to physically active daily than overweight or obese girls,but the difference wasn't significant.

Bergeron's advice to parents: Expose your kids to a lot of different sports and healthy physical activities, so they learn a variety of foundational skills and pursue and enjoy many different athletic interests. "Kids like to have fun. They like to participate. A diversified athletic experience early on will give kids the tools and capacity to be functionally and regularly active in a variety of ways, with great dividends for the rest of their lives."

Felicia Stoler, a registered dietitian and exercise physiologist in Holmdel, N.J., agrees. She says parents should lead by example and make physical activity a family affair. Go hiking or biking together at state or local parks; jump-rope together; shoot hoops; take a hip-hop class; go to an indoor rock-climbing center; take martial -rts classes; join an inexpensive gym; take active family vacations that include hiking and biking.

Justis for one, Justis for all

MARK RABAGO
TAGA Sports Associate Editor

If there ever was a Renaissance Man in local sports, that would be Justis "Cuki" Alvarez.

Unbeknownst to everyone, way before he became a household name in mixed martial arts and built up Trench Tech Promotions, Inc., Alvarez was a champion motocross and jetski rider and dabbled in some basketball in his youth.

The 43-year-old MMA fighter with the *nom de guerre* "The Flying Cockroach" said he was fortunate to have been born to an extreme sports-oriented family.

"My father, Ray Alvarez Sr., raced cars and motorcycles and flew hangliders off high mountains and cliffs for as long as I can remember. I would always follow him to all sorts of events and competitions."

The Alvarez family lived in the United States from 1970 to 1974, then moved to Guam in 1975. That was when his father bought Cuki and his brother Ray Jr. their very first motorcycle, a Suzuki RM 80.

"He taught us how to ride it and within minutes, we were riding solo around the village in Sinajana. Although it was considered a mini-bike, my dad took out the rear suspension so we could reach the ground with our feet when we stopped."

Those formative years ignited a lifelong passion for motocross.

"I immediately fell in love with bikes and raced motocross successfully throughout the years from 1977 to 2008 in the CNMI, Guam, Hawaii, Japan, and the Philippines. I also had the privilege of racing cars and jetskis in Guam, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia, and of course the USA. As you can see, I excelled in motor sports growing up. I won numerous races and titles in both jetski and motocross from 1977 to 2008."

Local motocross sadly fizzled out a few years ago due to a combination of factors.

"I'm saddened that motocross died out here because we had such a great fan base and a great bunch of people who loved to race bikes. We held international events every year from 1998 to 2007. It was an exciting nine years and I wish we could have continued, but circumstances such as the 9/11 attacks and our ailing economy probably affected our ability to afford bikes and gas. So it was only a matter of time before the high prices took its toll on everyone."

Always the optimist, Alvarez believes motocross as well as a close relative—drag racing—would return to the island sooner than later. He also foresees that, with the right people working together, the CNMI can have its very own motor sports complex.

Surprisingly, even before Kevin "The Big Hit" Fitial was lacing them up for the CNMI national team, Alvarez was a shooting guard for the Palauan Peacemakers in the Rotary Club of Saipan Youth Basketball League.

"My very first team was the Palauan Peacemakers and I played with them from 1994 to 1995. Then in 1996 I formed my own team—The Sharks—and we played for a few more years. I injured my knee in 2002 and had to get my ACL and meniscus lateral ligaments repaired in my right knee, so that is why you don't see me much on the court these days. But I still enjoy the game very much and learned a lot about teamwork from the game."

Nowadays, you can pretty much always bump into Alvarez at the Trench Tech Gym's new home in Garapan, where he trains everyone, from established MMA fighters to up-and-comers to soccer moms—all trying to get their daily workout fix.

Like motocross, jetski, and basketball, Alvarez's introduction to the world of MMA came early and often.

"I got my very first crack at martial arts in 1975 when my father enrolled my brother and I in a taekwondo class at the USO in Cabras, Guam. I loved it and enjoyed watching Bruce Lee and other kung fu flicks every weekend on Saturday Kung Fu Theatre! I guess you can say I wanted to be like Bruce Lee! He was a legend."

He may very well be the Rocky Marciano of the local MMA scene because of his undefeated record but Alvarez has only fought

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/MARK RABAGO

TOP PHOTO: Alvarez flies high on his motorbike in a race in 2002. **BOTTOM FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:** Justis "Cuki" Alvarez holds his trophy high after winning in a motocross race in Cowtown in the late 1990s; Alvarez poses with other participants of the said race; and Alvarez in action. Alvarez shares the podium with Philippine motocross champion Ernie Leongson, center. Alvarez trains mixed martial arts fighters at his Trench Tech Gym in Garapan. Alvarez tries his hand in wakeboarding.

six times, the last of which was a first round submission of Wyneu Bamba in PXC 19 on May 1, 2010.

One of the reasons "The Flying Cockroach" doesn't step inside the octagon that much these days is his involvement as owner of Trench Tech Promotions, which organizes local MMA bouts like Rites of Passage, Trench Warz, and Art of War.

Alvarez said his career as an MMA promoter started in May 2004 when Leverage MMA Promotions brought Fury Fighting Islands to Tinian for the island's annual fiesta.

"The promoters were all MMA friends of mine and they asked me to look for a few Saipan fighters to compete against Guam guys for the event. So I went to all the taekwondo, karate, and boxing gyms on island and passed out fliers and encouraged our local guys to test their martial arts skills."

While the fighters he recruited fought valiantly and showed a lot of heart, all of them lost in Fury Fighting Islands and that inspired Alvarez to establish a gym on island to train local MMA fighters.

"It wasn't because they didn't have good skills, they just didn't have any ground skills. All the Guam fighters took the fights to the ground and submitted all the Saipan guys. I felt so bad it was at that point when I decided to open up an MMA school and hire a full-time Brazilian jiu jitsu and MMA instructor to teach us the ground techniques we lacked."

From the ashes of the defeat against Guamanians in Fury Fighting Island rose Trench Tech Gym in October 2005. Aside from its obvious reference to the Marianas Trench, he named it Trench Tech because it alludes to "deep," which refers to the ground technique he so badly wants to espouse among local fighters.

As he's already getting long in the tooth, questions about entirely retiring from competitive MMA fighting inevitably crops up time and again and Alvarez seems to agree that it might be time to hang the grappling gloves and mouthpiece once and for all.

"I realize that at 43 years old, time realistically is not on my side if I want to make a career out of fighting. I fought my very first MMA fight in December of 2005 in Fury Fighting Islands and my last fight in May of 2010 in the Pacific Xtreme Combat. I was fortunate and content with fighting and winning all of my six pro bouts during those years and decided to focus on training and mentoring my guys full time. I get more satisfaction watching them compete and seeing them reach their goals."

MARK RABAGO

From bullying target to black belt

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

MARK RABAGO

LEFT PHOTO: Black-belter Kody Foreman leads students of Camacho Taekwondo Center during warm-up exercises. **TOP PHOTO:** Vicente Camacho, right, poses with his students and other instructors of his Camacho Taekwondo Center in Gualo Rai.

Ten-year-old Kody Foreman used to get bullied in school. To combat this and gain valuable self-confidence, he enrolled at the Camacho Taekwondo Center in Gualo Rai two years ago.

It absolutely helped that the *do jang* (Korean for dojo) is ran and operated by his uncle, Vicente Camacho. Yes, that Vicente Camacho who is the executive director of the Veterans Affairs Office. Camacho set up his very own *do jang* following a 24-year career with the U.S. Army and four years after working at the Pentagon.

Foreman, the son of Eugene and Celina Foreman of Gualo Rai, admitted that his first intention when he took lessons in the Korean martial arts was to get even with his tormentors.

A lot, however, has changed in the two years since. Now the center's youngest black belt, the be-dimpled and very respectful Foreman said that taekwondo has taught him not only self-confidence and an ability to defend himself but also restraint, discipline, and value for life.

A year Foreman's senior, Vivica Kaipat, said she too took taekwondo lessons in part to defend herself.

The 11-year-old Finasisu resident said what she likes the most since enrolling in the school is that she learned various kicks and forms. Now a green belt, Kaipat said she hopes to someday become a black-belter.

For 17-year-old Zackery Yamagishi, taking up taekwondo was actually sort of a compromise with his mom, Lynn.

The third year student at Marianas High School originally wanted to join mixed martial arts, but her mother feared for her son's safety inside the octagon where fights can be brutal and savage.

Aside from self-discipline and patience, one offshoot from his yearlong enrollment at the Camacho Taekwondo Center is that he learned to be compassionate to others.

Now a black belt, Yamagishi said he hopes to one day compete in taekwondo tournaments.

One of the *do jang*'s youngest student is Alyssa Muyon. The 7-year-old started taking lessons five months ago, and so far she's enjoyed every second of it.

The daughter of Matt and Jennifer Burns of Koblerville, Muyon said she now knows how to defend herself and is no longer afraid of getting bullied in school. She thinks taekwondo is also great exercise and dreams one day of being promoted to black belt.

Chief instructor and owner Vicente Camacho said he opened the school in 2011 to help the local population stay fit and learn the precepts of the Korean martial arts.

The five-dun taekwondo black belt said not only is he espousing self-defense but also for his students to defend those who cannot defend themselves.

Camacho, however, strongly believes that the best way to get out of fights is turning away from it.

While acknowledging that some of his students enroll to fight off bullies in school, he said some parents also take their children to Camacho Taekwondo Center to resolve their kids' ADHD issues.

"It just gives them an outlet," said Camacho, who first took up taekwondo when he was 17 years old.

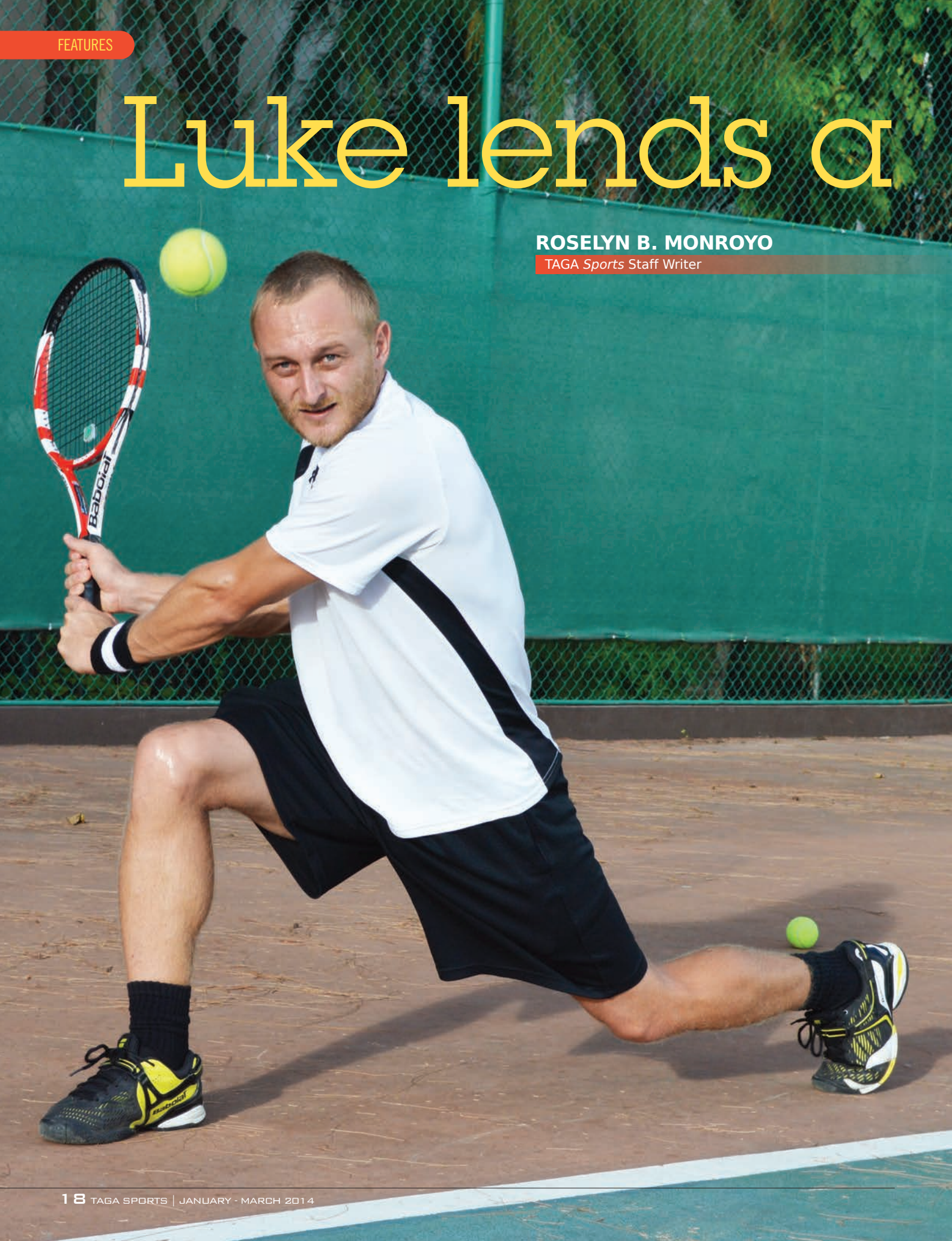
Another thing that Camacho is strict with at the *do jang* are his students' grades. He regularly checks on his students' report cards and those with failing grades are suspended from taekwondo classes until their grades go up.

Currently, Camacho Taekwondo Center has more than 50 students. It is open Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 6pm to 7:30pm; and Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6pm to 7pm.

For more information, call 287-5351.

Luke lends a

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer



helping hand

Here's some more bad news for the CNMI's rivals in tennis. Tennis pro Luke Michael Beling is now training several Commonwealth junior players—a group that's fast becoming a tennis powerhouse in the Micronesian region and has made notable performances in the entire Pacific.

Beling has been conducting regular training sessions at the Fiesta Resort & Spa Saipan since arriving on island less than a year ago. He is from East London, South Africa, and brings with him an impressive résumé. He was ranked in the Top 15 in South Africa's junior tennis, earned a tennis scholarship at Campbellsville University (a National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and National Christian College Athletic Association Division 1-member school), and had a finals stint at the U.S. Open qualifying tournament over a year ago. Before heading to Saipan with his wife Kristy to teach at Whispering Palms School, Beling worked as a teaching pro for a sanctioned USTA club in Minnesota.

Beling took over the coaching chores at Fiesta from former CNMI National Team member Bobby Cruz, making him one of the two notable teaching pros on the island. Long-time CNMI coach Jeff Race is the other one.

"Before coming to Saipan, I contacted Jeff Race who suggested Fiesta Resort as a possible place to coach. When I arrived on Saipan I met former coach Bobby Cruz who was at that time looking for someone to take his place at Fiesta Resort. It was perfect timing," he said.

Right now, Beling has more than 20 students who, according to him, have been showing a lot of promise.

"One of my first lessons at Fiesta was with my 'Top Gun' class. This class is filled with some of the best junior players on the island. The first practice was filled with a lot of energy and enthusiasm. The players were eager to work and train hard. I was very impressed and pleased about their positive attitudes," Beling said.

His classes, which run on weekdays from 3:30pm to 7pm are divided into six levels. The Top 3 levels practice every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and the bottom three have their turns on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Private and hitting lessons are also done after 7pm.

Beling acknowledged the CNMI's successful tennis program under Race and he hopes to help the Commonwealth bets maintain its reign in the region.

"There are already so many fantastic things happening with tennis on the island. Having finished my college career not too long ago, I feel like I can help prepare up-and-coming juniors to play at this high level of competition. Having spent two years working as a tennis professional for a sanctioned USTA club in Minnesota, I have gained insight and experience in the way that tennis is evolving as a sport. I believe this to be a very valuable asset to share with Saipan's tennis community. Because I know what it takes in terms of training and competition, I believe that the 'more hands on deck' will ultimately serve in the best interest of the current and up-and-coming players on Saipan," he said.

Playing for the CNMI

The 29-year-old coach is also open to the possibility of representing the Commonwealth in regional tournaments in the future.

"I love the idea. The thought of representing such a beautiful place and people would be an honor and an enormous opportunity and highlight of my tennis career. That is something I look very forward to," said Beling, who played his first tournament on Saipan in November last year.

Beling, who advanced to the mixed doubles finals of the U.S. Open qualifying event in Kansas City more than a year ago, won the men's singles, mixed doubles, and men's doubles events in the 5th Tan Holdings Tennis Classic. His Saipan debut was highlighted by a 6-0, 6-0 victory over Race and it came after nearly one year of missing tennis due to a knee injury.

Though he loves to play, Beling said he finds it easier to coach.

"Coaching feels like being in a helicopter over a raging battle. You can see the whole picture. You can see where your men are in relation to where the enemy is and where he may plan to attack next. Playing feels like you're in the heart of the battlefield, not knowing where the next sniper rifle or grenade may come from."

As a coach, he wants his players "to be free and brave" during tournaments. He has the same motto as a player.

"It's hardly true that I ever encounter a competitor who doesn't care about winning. I find that during tournaments players end up caring too much about winning or playing well. So once they learn how to relax and just have fun in the battle while being confident, winning will take care of itself," Beling said.

BACK TO BASICS

Simple games of childhood are getting a second look

CAROL TANNEHILL
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Come dusk, neighborhoods would be crawling with them. All summer, they'd swarm over lawns, under porches, behind hedges, through alleys. Their shrill cries would echo in the darkness. There was no stopping them...

At least not until reruns of "The Wonderful World of Disney" came on.

"We used to play all those games in the summer...kick the can, hide-and-seek, baseball in vacant lots—back when there still were vacant lots," recalled baby boomer Evalyn Fate, a Bluffton, Ind., homemaker. "We used to play until our parents made us come home. My mom would always call me in for 'Father Knows Best.'"

The outdoor games of boomers' childhoods are getting attention again, thanks to nostalgic books and Web sites and to news reports that recess staples such as tag and dodge ball are being banned from politically correct playgrounds throughout the country.

Stephen A. Cohen's *The Games We Played: A Celebration of Childhood and Imagination* pays tribute to stoopball and other deceptively simple pastimes. Internet sites streetplay.com and gameskidsplay.net are devoted to preserving the handed-down traditions of urban and suburban games by offering rule archives, discussion boards, an e-newsletter and coverage of related events, such as a recent adult stickball tournament in New York.

SHARON M. STEINMAN/FORT WORTH DALLAS

Five-year-old Tristan Curtis plays hopscotch on the Sport Court at her Flower Mound, Texas home.

The goal is "to recall when it was OK to go outside, hang out with friends and have a great time playing activities that didn't require a coach, schedule or major amount of brand-name equipment," the founders of streetplay.com said. "We're also interested in encouraging parents to share some of these games and enjoyment with their kids."

If you're old enough to know what "onesies" and "twosies" are—or so young that you've never screamed "olly, olly oxen free"—then read on. Our guide to the good old games of summer may spark memories or help you make some new ones.

BACKYARD CROQUET

ORIGIN: The game began in the mid-19th century in Great Britain, although it may have earlier origins as an indoor lawn bowling game played in 14th-century France.
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: two to six
EQUIPMENT: croquet set (six mallets, six wooden balls, nine wickets and two stakes)
SETTING: Open lawn, preferably with short grass. A regular court is 100 feet by 50 feet, but you can adapt it to fit whatever space is available. Nine wickets (metal arches) and two wooden stakes are arranged in a double diamond pattern—one stake and two wickets at each of the two end points and one wicket marking each of four side points and the single center point where the two diamonds meet. Most croquet sets come with a diagram.
HOW TO PLAY: Sequence of play is determined by ball color: blue goes first, followed by red, black, yellow, green and orange. Beginning with the stake at the bottom of the course, players try to advance their balls counterclockwise through the course by hitting them with a mallets. Players earn extra turns for navigating through wickets in the proper direction and sequence. Whenever a player's ball hits an opponent's ball, the player may step on his or her own ball, tap it with the mallet and try to knock the opponent's ball out of play, thereby delaying the opponent's progress. The first player to complete the course wins.

BADMINTON

ORIGIN: The game was brought to England in the mid-1800s by British officers serving in India. The game gets its name from Badminton, Gloucestershire, where the game was first played in England.
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: two (singles) or four (doubles)
EQUIPMENT: one badminton racket per player, a shuttlecock and net (or string) placed 5 feet above the ground and spanning the center of the court
SETTING: Regulation courts are 22 feet by 44 feet, but the backyard version may be played on whatever space is available.
HOW TO PLAY: As with tennis, badminton players use a racket to volley the shuttlecock—also known as a "bird" or "birdie"—over the net. To start play, one player serves the shuttlecock from the right half of his or her side to the half diagonally opposite; serving then alternates left and right. If the shuttlecock doesn't go over the net or the server commits a fault, the serve shifts to the opponent (in singles) or to the server's partner (in doubles). If the receiving player or team commits a fault, the serving team earns a point. Players earn points whenever they serve or hit the shuttlecock over the net and the opponents fail to return it. The first team to earn 15 points wins.

JACKS

ORIGIN: unknown
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: two to six
EQUIPMENT: 15 jacks and one small rubber ball
SETTING: any smooth surface
HOW TO PLAY: The jacks are tossed gently onto the playing surface. Players sit on the ground. The first player throws the ball in the air, then tries, with one hand, to pick up one jack ("onesies") and catch the ball after one bounce. If the player succeeds, he or she tries to pick up two jacks ("twosies") and catch the ball after one bounce. If he or she misses, the turn passes to the next opponent. On the first player's next turn, he or she reattempts the number missed on. The winner is the person who reached the highest number of jacks at quitting time.

KICK THE CAN

ORIGIN: a variant of tag and hide-and-seek
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: three or more
EQUIPMENT: an aluminum can, lid removed and filled with rocks
SETTING: street or yard of any terrain, preferably one surrounded by hiding places
HOW TO PLAY: "It" stands by the can, closes his or her eyes and counts to a predetermined number, while the other players run and hide. "It" then seeks the other players. Once players have been discovered, they must run back to the can and kick it before "it" tags one of them.

HORSESHOES

ORIGIN: The game is thought to have started as a time-passer among blacksmiths and farriers, people who shoe horses.

NUMBER OF PLAYERS: two to four
EQUIPMENT: pitching horseshoes in two colors and two stakes
SETTING: A court is made up of two stakes driven into the ground 40 feet apart. A pit of sand, dirt or clay surrounds each stake.
HOW TO PLAY: Participants decide either to play to 40 points or to toss 40 shoes. Each player pitches two horseshoes in succession toward the opposite stake. Any horseshoe within a horseshoe's width of the stake can earn points. The player with the closest shoe to the stake gets one point. If he or she has two shoes closer than any of the opponent's, he or she gets two points. A ringer (a shoe that completely encircles the stake) gets three points, unless the opponent cancels it out by landing a ringer on top of it. A player who has a ringer and the closest shoe earns four points. Leaners—horseshoes touching the stake but not encircling it—are worth one point and are considered closer than any other pitch except a ringer. Players can play in teams (one member on each end) or individually.

JUMP-ROPE

ORIGIN: unknown
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: three or more
EQUIPMENT: a long jump-rope
SETTING: level asphalt or concrete street, driveway or sidewalk
HOW TO PLAY: Two people turn the rope while the third player dashes in and begins jumping over the rope as it brushes the ground. Jumpers sing songs or recite rhymes. The verses count the number of jumps ("Grace, Grace, dressed in lace"); call other players to join the jumper ("I like coffee, I like tea, I want Joe to jump with me"); or require a show of skills ("Teddy bear, teddy bear, turn around"). For more rhymes, check out "Anna Banana: 101 Jump-Rope Rhymes" by Joanna Cole.

SPUD

ORIGIN: unknown
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: three or more
EQUIPMENT: a lightweight plastic ball
SETTING: street or yard
HOW TO PLAY: Players are given a number; one of them is chosen to be "it." He or she throws the ball into the air, then calls out another player's number. The player with that number runs to catch the ball and yells "Spud!" Meanwhile, the other players run as far as they can; as soon as they hear "Spud!" they must stop. The person who caught the ball takes "two giant steps" and throws the ball at any player . If the ball hits, the human target gets the letter "S" (followed by P, U and D) as punishment and becomes "it." If the ball misses, "it" must be "it" again. Players are thrown out of the game when they get four hits or misses; the remaining player wins.

HOPSCOTCH

ORIGIN: Variations of the game were used in ancient times as agility exercises for Roman soldiers.
NUMBER OF PLAYERS: two or more
EQUIPMENT: sidewalk chalk and a place marker, such as a stone, bottle cap or coin

SETTING: Players draw a hopscotch board (or use a ready-made board on a playground) featuring numbered squares—some single and some side-by-side.
HOW TO PLAY: The players take turns. Each player tosses a marker toward a designated square (Square No. 1 on the first turn, Square No. 2 on the second turn and so on.) If the marker lands on the wrong square or on the chalk line, the player gives up a turn. If it lands on the correct square, the player maneuvers through the board by hopping, in numerical order, on single squares with one foot and by straddling double squares with both feet. When the player reaches the end of the board, he or she turns and heads back toward the start, picking up the marker on the return trip. The first person through the entire course wins.

IT&E's got the back of CNMI athletes

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Local sports federations always face challenges in finding the funds they need to implement their programs but they manage to survive, thanks to generous corporate sponsors like IT&E.

IT&E assists the Commonwealth's athletes and teams in almost all sports. No less than the company's chief executive officer, Danilo J. Mojica, admits their company's bias for sports.

"Part of IT&E's mission is to be a positive force in the communities that it serves. We see young people as a critical part of any society and sports is a great venue to develop the young people. And therefore we have a bias for sports in general and not just one sport," Mojica said.

Through the years, IT&E has opened up its wallets to soccer, badminton, basketball, tennis, little league baseball, billiards, and triathlon. Other sports—swimming, cycling,

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

MP United FC U18 players pose for a photo after ruling the 2012 FA Challenge Cup.

baseball, and athletics—also receive other forms of support from the company.

IT&E is a proud sponsor of MP United Football Club, one of the most notable groups in the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association. IT&E also helps NMIFA's teams that compete in off-island tournaments and the telecommunication giant was once a title sponsor of a futsal league, another program under NMIFA.

MP United vice president Norman del Rosario said that IT&E plays a crucial role in the club's success.

"The club's development program for the youth players are implemented thorough the help of IT&E. If we have new ideas and given opportunities to compete off-island, we are confident that these will happen because IT&E has our backs all the time," del Rosario said.

IT&E has also taken care of one of the signature events under the Northern Marianas Badminton Association's calendar. NMBA secretary general Merlie Tolentino said that IT&E has been sponsoring the group's mixed doubles and men's and women's doubles tournament every second quarter of the year since 2007.

Tolentino said that IT&E's seven-year partnership with NMBA is a testament to the company's long-term commitment to sports development in the CNMI.

In basketball, IT&E showed its support for government employees when it became the title sponsor of a revived inter-government league a few years back. The company also reached out to masters and youth players by fielding a team in the NMI Masters Federation-sanctioned tournament and supporting the Garapan Rollers Basketball Club.

In tennis, IT&E helped the CNMI make history when it sponsored the first ever Junior ITF ranking tournament held in the Commonwealth. The event, the IT&E Northern Marianas Open Junior Championships, drew players from around the world and proved that the CNMI has the capability to host international tournaments.

Other internationally flavored tournaments that the CNMI hosted and IT&E supported were last year's XTERRA Saipan Championship and Tagaman Triathlon, the longest triathlon event in the Pacific.

IT&E's support for XTERRA and Tagaman, which lures off-island pros, started several years ago and is not limited to just financial assistance.

"All of our big donors are an integral part of the sporting events. However, ITE has provided cash, hats, tents, and crucial aid stations since the time they began being a part of Tagaman (when the company was then known as MTC). Then because of Brad Ruszala, who produced the race last year in my absence, IT&E's participation has been more integrated than the other sponsors that provided money and in-kind donations," Taga Inc. president Wolf Mojica said.

This year, Tagaman will be celebrating its 25th year and IT&E is expected to be part of that milestone, as it vows to continue backing numerous sporting events in the CNMI.

"IT&E has been and will remain a strong supporter of all types of sports in the CNMI," IT&E sales and marketing manager Hans Mickelson said.

And what does IT&E expect to get back from the sports, athletes, and teams it helps?

"Winning is always great, but that's not the main reason IT&E supports local sports. I think the best ways that athletes can give back to IT&E is to try their very best when competing, show respect to their fellow competitors, and encourage others to participate in sporting activities," Mickelson said.

'The Shark' prowls Hawaiian waters

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

As the old saying goes, you can take the boy out of the island but you can never take the island out of the boy. But what if the boy simply goes to another island? In the case of Mark "The Shark" Halstead, one of the CNMI's most decorated bowlers, he hopped over to Hawaii in 2006.

Before migrating to the 50th state of the Union, Halstead was a familiar fixture in Commonwealth bowling, dominating the local scene and amassing approximately 20 major tournament wins, more than 150 team championships, and over 200 high average awards on Saipan.

MARK RABAGO

Mark "The Shark" Halstead won approximately 20 major bowling tournaments on Siapan before relocating to Hawaii in 2006.

In an email to TAGA *Sports*, Halstead said he and his family relocated to Hawaii in August 2006 because his wife, Elsie, wanted to raise their children in a more conducive environment.

"Hawaii is one of the best locations to raise a family. Our son, Travis, recently graduated from McKinley High School and has plans to attend Kapiolani Community College next spring 2014. Our daughter Tomiko is a junior and a varsity athlete at McKinley. She will be the captain of the water polo team for the spring 2014 season."

Living in Hawaii, according to Halstead, has many benefits, including not having to worry about power outages, outrageous utility bills, humid conditions, and salt water coming from the tap.

He is the first to admit, however, that Hawaii has its disadvantages, foremost of which is the high cost of living.

"Hawaii tops the nation's cost of living. It's really expensive! We live in Waikiki and I do a lot of walking around. There are so many tourists that it doesn't seem like we are in a recession. I adjusted rather quickly because Oahu—like Saipan—has tropical weather, beautiful sunsets, good food, and there is always something to do. However, I must admit that I truly miss my mother, Maria, and the rest of my family. I miss Saipan's warm ocean...it's too cold to swim in Hawaiian waters."

When it comes to his favorite sport, though, a brief flirtation with the local bowling leagues left him cold, saying that bowling folks in Hawaii sadly don't compare to his brothers-in-arms back home.

"When we first moved here, I joined a bowling league in November 2006. I was averaging 185 and came in third place in the high average award category. I was also asked to be a member of the Oahu Bowling Association, but my involvement was short-lived. I shockingly lost interest in bowling because the bowlers here were nowhere in comparison to the bowlers [on] Saipan. There was a lack of camaraderie. There was no team spirit and I didn't return to the league as of July 2007. I know someday I will return to Saipan and look forward to reigniting my passion for bowling with my friends. "

Halstead's passion for the sport was ingrained at an early age by his father, a U.S. Coast Guard officer who himself—in a strange twist of fate decades earlier—relocated his family to Saipan from Honolulu.

"I got started in bowling during the period when my dad was in the U.S. Coast Guard and, while stationed in Honolulu, he asked his us children to choose a sport. We all chose bowling. I got hooked on it from day one because my first score was a surprising161. That score inspired me from that point on."

He wasn't kidding when he said he got hooked. It came to an extent that the young Halstead would watch professional bowling whenever he had a chance.

Among his biggest influences in the game are professional left-handed bowlers, Earl Anthony and Mike Aulby. "These are the two people I grew up idolizing. They learned from their techniques, and I worked hard by practicing whenever it was possible."

Unfortunately, Halstead has yet to fulfill every bowler's dream of rolling a perfect game—12 consecutive strikes. He volunteered that he is somewhat envious of Robert Talavera, a bowling contemporary on Saipan who has not only rolled a perfect game once but repeated it an amazing six times.

"My biggest achievement in bowling was my 299 game that I bowled in March of 1998, which is my highest score. Robert Talavera is my biggest rival and we would push each other to beat one another. We each displayed good sportsmanship and we remain good friends today! We both think the other is the best bowler!"

Before heading back to his ship skippering duties, Halstead has only one valuable tip to dispense for aspiring keglers and that is to practice as often as possible.

"My advice would be to practice, practice, practice, and watch your ball on every delivery. Hit the friggin head pin!"

He also has this message to his friends in and outside the friendly confines of the Saipan Bowling Center: "What I miss the most about Saipan is my family and friends. But Mark 'The Shark' will be returning so bowl better and watch your game! I am looking forward to getting back to the game in the near future."

MARK RABAGO

Mark "The Shark" Halstead promises to come home to Saipan soon and rekindle his passion for the sport.

THE MAKING OF A HALL OF FAMER

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

In 2007, Ricardo "Rick" Duenas was inducted to the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame, an honor he never saw coming.

"When you're young, all you want to do is play. You never think of winning an award," he said.

So how did the 73-year-old Chalan Laulau resident end up making it to the elite circle of CNMI athletes and officials?

He polished his skills in Guam when he was in high school, learned and played against Peace Corps teams when he returned to Saipan, left a mark in competitive leagues here, and coached volleyball squads.

Seeking improvement in Guam

Duenas got involved in sports during his elementary days on Saipan, but improved his skills in Guam.

"I was enrolled at the Saipan Intermediate School (now Hopwood Junior High School) and we played sports there. We played volleyball and softball. But back then (1950s) there were no organized tournaments on Saipan so we played by jungle rules—you're on your own, no fundamentals," he said.

After finishing ninth grade on Saipan, Duenas' family sent him to Guam to continue his studies. He started at Father Duenas Memorial School but graduated at the George Washington High School in 1961. While in Guam, he became a member of baseball, basketball, and volleyball teams of these schools and his village, Barrigada.

"Some of my classmates on Saipan went to Guam too, but returned home because they were homesick. I would have quit school, too, if not for sports," said Duenas.

He added baseball and basketball to the sports he played in Guam and on several occasions was also into soccer and American football. He was a running back in his short-lived days playing American football, forced to quit as his family did not want him to get injured.

"There were a lot of opportunities in Guam so I was really busy. I met different coaches and learned a lot from them. I was lucky I had a very strong body and could play different sports," he said.

Duenas, who played shortstop both in fast-pitch softball and baseball, was so impressive in various leagues and school competitions in Guam that he was selected for a team bound for the famous Little

Bigger League (renamed as the Babe Ruth League). Over 1,000 U18 players tried out for the 25 slots on the squad. Unfortunately, a few days before leaving for Pennsylvania for the tournament, he was declared ineligible for the event because he was not a U.S. citizen. Back then, Saipan was under the U.N. Trust Territory.

Keeping up against Peace Corps

The lost opportunity in Guam did not prevent Duenas from becoming a better player so when he returned to Saipan equipped with a vastly improved skills, he held his own against the much bigger and experienced Peace Corps players.

"When the Peace Corps came in the 1960s, Saipan started to have regular leagues and tournaments. We were pitted against the tall Peace Corps players. We played volleyball and basketball against these players and with our local pride at stake, we managed to keep up with them and even beat them," said Duenas, who played as a strong side hitter for the Breakers.

The Breakers went on to log an unbeaten record from 1967 to 1970, according to Kurt Barnes, who was a Peace Corps volunteer and eventually coached and played for the Saipan players-dominated Breakers.

Duenas was also a force to reckon with in baseball, as he was known as a clean-up hitter and once made two home runs in a single inning. He was a frequent fixture on Francisco "Tan Ko" Palacios' stats sheets, as he was among the league leaders in batting average, RBIs, and home runs.

In basketball, the shooting forward averaged close to 30 points for the Islanders, who won the championship in the Saipan Islandwide Basketball League from 1970 to 1974.

Turn to coaching

After more than 20 years of playing various sports, Duenas called it quits and switched to coaching volleyball teams.

He called the shots for the CNMI Women's National Team that competed in the South Pacific Games in Fiji in 1979. He also coached a women's squad that played in New Caledonia in the 1980s.

Which was tougher: playing or coaching?

Duenas picked the latter. He said a player has only himself to prepare for the game, while a coach needs to put things in order for six to 12 players.

"It takes a lot of time and patience to coach a team. But I will still choose to coach because I wanted to give back what my coaches taught me before," said Duenas, who is now retired and devotes his time to tending his yard and joining fishing derbies.

Sports legend

Besides being inducted into the CNMI Sports Hall of Fame, Duenas also made it to the *Sports Legends of Micronesia*, a book authored by Barnes and lists the who's who of the region's sports from 1966 to 2012.

The former multi-sports athlete was deeply honored with the recognition, which he said could be based on three factors.

Duenas said one may be considered a sports legend if he has the statistics to prove it. "Stats don't lie," he said.

Second, let the credible people who saw you play say that you're a legend. Don't claim your own greatness.

Third, and the most important of them all, according to Duenas, is sportsmanship. He said one's incredible play can be overlooked if he does not know how to conduct himself properly on the court.

"I can proudly say that I was never involved in any fight during my playing days. I did not argue with the officials or say bad words to players and spectators. I kept my cool and focused on the game."

Happy New Year to the CNMI sports community!

Wishing that 2014 will bring you more luck on all your sporting endeavors and activities!

We also support your effort to make the Commonwealth healthier and more competitively organized in the new year.

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